

Community Preservation Act Committee (CPAC)
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, August 25th, 2015

The meeting was called to order and the public hearing was opened by Mary Streeter, Chair, at 7:05 pm, who noted that although the public hearing was listed on the agenda for 8:00 pm it was posted for 7:00 pm.

Committee members in attendance: Paris Boice, Jim Brissette, Peter Jessop, Laura Lovett, Jim Oldham, Pari Riahi, Diana Stein, Mary Streeter, and Andy Steinberg, Select Board Liaison.

Committee members absent: Marilyn Blaustein

Staff and others in attendance: Sonia Aldrich, Dave Ziomek, Nate Malloy, Ron Bohonowicz, Rebecca Demling, Carol Gray, Jeff Lee, Cameron Lee, Jim Brassard, Vince O'Connor, Larry Kelley, Joanna Morse.

Agenda

7:00 FY 16 Proposal Presentations for consideration at Fall Special Town Meeting:

- 7:00—North Common.
- 7:20—Crocker Farm Preschool Playground.
- 7:40—Little Red Schoolhouse Move.

8:00 Public Hearing

Untimed Items:

- Review financial status.
- Updates on past projects.
- Review and revise FY 17 Proposal Letter, if time.
- Schedule future meetings -
- Approve any minutes.
- Topics the Chair did not reasonably anticipate 48 hours before the meeting

Presentation: North Common

Dave Ziomek and Nate Malloy gave a Powerpoint presentation and explained the proposal:

- The CPA request is linked with a request for state PARC grant funding. A similar proposal came before the committee three years ago, but the project did not go forward because although well received by the state it was not funded.
- Focus is on North Common, directly in front of Town Hall. Context: Amherst has maintained its common with limited encroachment for hundreds of years.
- Current conditions: High pedestrian use, frequent events, not many walkways, no lighting, exposed roots, compacted soils, significant runoff, limited seating, poor turf, poor drainage, electrical service from 1950s, tree wells from 1960s. Not much investment in decades.
- Of 16 existing trees, two were proposed to be removed, 6-10 to be planted. Still just concept design, but aim to keep as many trees as possible, to put paths where people walk, to reduce erosion.
- Budget is about \$590K, PARC design-build grant reimburses 70% up to maximum of \$400K. If awarded design phase through June 2016. Public process with Historical Commission, LSSE, and other committees (Public Works, DRB). Final decision by Select Board. Construction July 2016-June 2017.

- Public outreach to date: Jan. 2013, April 2014, and Sept. 2015.

Committee questions:

- Jim Brissette asked about the large figure in the budget for stone masonry. Answer: This is to address possible need for retaining wall to manage the grade and promote accessibility
- Mary Streeter asked about the implication of the CPA requirement for putting a historic preservation restriction on the common. Answer: The common is already protected under state law so Town Counsel believes requirements for restriction under CPA or PARC grants are already met.
- Laura Lovett: April 2014 meeting, one comment requested green infrastructure, including permeable pavement. Doesn't appear to be in existing plan, would like to encourage that concept. Answer: Current budget is simply conceptual design, no ideas are off the table.
- Mary Streeter: Going forward, how will the town deal with on-going maintenance? Answer: This is ongoing discussion. Part of goal is to have a design that doesn't demand excessive maintenance over time.

Public Comment—Vince O'Connor offered several suggestions:

Ask BID to make a contribution to town share of the cost

Consider restoring part of the common from parking

There has to be some guarantee that design won't evolve to eliminate more than two trees.

Welcome new committee member

The Chair welcomed Pari Riahi, the new Planning Board representative to the CPA committee, and other committee members introduced themselves.

Presentation: Crocker Farm Preschool Playground

Presentation by Ron Bohonowicz, director of facilities for ARPS, Rebecca Demling, president ARPS PGO, and Peter Wells, Berkshire Design Group

- Proposal is for complete redesign of pre-school playground serving 3-5 year old students.
- Used by up to 90 students during the school day. At least 50% of students have communication, physical or cognitive disabilities that are being addressed through individual educational program. There are before- and after-school care programs using the space as well as the preschool program
- Current equipment is not legal or appropriate for institutional use or for these students. There are significant access issues for people with disabilities, including a large step down to the playground and a significant grade.
- Town meeting has approved 25K in capital expenses to address accessibility issues and Amherst Education Foundation has approved a \$14K grant to help with that as well. Schools have paid for Berkshire Design work on developing the current proposal.
- Goals: create a playground that is inclusive (serves all children of target age group) and has a high play value.
- Plan will expand the site by 30%. Entire area will be level. Poured rubberized surface throughout for tricycles, etc. Wood engineered fiber on other parts of the surface work like wood chips but facilitate wheel chair access. Natural style playground (water, sand, rocks

etc) rather than lots of colored equipment. There will be climbing structure, garden plots, shade structure and some existing trees, concrete fossils. Everything fully accessible.

Committee questions:

- Jim Brissette: What maintenance will be required and can the space be used in winter? Answer: Current playground is used year round. The building maintenance person for Crocker Farm has provided guidance on how to design to support on-going maintenance and all these suggestions have been incorporated into the plan.
- Peter Jessop: What is the anticipated life span of this playground? Answer: Berkshire Design's experience shows that rubberized surface can last 28 years, equipment should last 20-25 years.
- Laura Lovett: Will the playground serve other ages (older children) as well? Answer: School already has play areas for ages 5-12, this is only playground at any of the town schools for preschool, so it will be designed specifically for ages 2-5. Playground will be open to public after hours, where adults can bring young children.
- Diana Stein: Will sand areas be covered at night to keep animals out? Answer: Yes.
- Jim Oldham: Are there any opportunities for cost savings in this plan, particularly in the \$100K budgeted expense for site furnishings? Answer: There were more even more expensive devices we didn't even ask for. Total budget is \$276K. We currently have the \$25K in town capital funds and \$14K, and we will look to some in-kind services. We're looking for about \$250K from CPA. The proposed equipment was chosen by staff working with Occupational and Physical Therapists to plan for the needs of children long term, not just those who are currently there but those who will come. The plan calls for a wide array of equipment to provide for physical and sensory needs of this diverse group. It would be hard to cut anything without feeling something is missing in terms of developmentally appropriate equipment.
- Peter Jessop why is the request not \$236K (\$276K less almost \$40K already received)? Answer: Budget needs review, so we can't be sure the price won't go higher.
- Preschool staff is working on fundraising this fall, asking PGOs to support this effort, aiming to reduce the amount needed from CPA.
- Mary Streeter: What kinds of creative cost savings have been considered? Could an art class of older students at ARMS or ARHS create fossils? Could raised beds be built by volunteers? Are there other ways to address the high costs keeping in mind the other needs in town such as affordable housing? Answer: School maintenance and Town public works staff can provide in-kind labor to help keep down costs. Boulders might be donated.

Presentation: Little Red School House

Before the presentation started, Peter Jessop responded to an email to the Chair from a Town Meeting member concerned about a possible conflict of interest. He explained that for many years he owned a construction company in town and that that company did do work for Amherst College during that time. However, he has sold that company and has no stock or financial interest in that company.

Carol Gray presented, on behalf of Little Red School House Preservation Committee

- Demolition application came before Historical Commission on May 19. Members of LRSHPC requested a demolition delay which was granted. Demolition delay will expire on May 19, 2016.
- Presentation summarizes history and architectural significance of the building also provided in written proposal
- Amherst College requirements in order to donate the building:
A legal entity needs to be willing and able to receive
No financial obligation to the college--Costs need to be covered
Future use of building must be consistent with Amherst College mission
Building must be whole at end
The move must be completed in a 2 week window at end of year
Building code updates as required.
Plan to address all these elements must be in place by March 1
- Gray described potential costs for moving the building, and ideas and possibilities for where to site it, noting that there are many moving parts, request is contingent on them coming together

Other speakers:

- Joanna Morse spoke to the significant community benefit of saving a school with such a connection with so many people. There are many possible recipients, UMASS is an exciting one because it is a public institution
- Jim Brassard, Chief of operations at Amherst College stated that although the college has strong belief in preservation, after rigorous study they found the costs too high. The college has spent millions on historic preservation, but in this case the benefit wasn't close enough to college mission. College's numbers differ significantly from those Carol Gray shared
- Vince O'Connor noted that one school in town, Fort River, lacks a preschool at or near it, suggests that might be a location for the school house.
- Jeff Lee read a letter in support of saving the Little Red School House from Jonathan Zimmerman, author and Professor of Education and History at New York University
- Committee members asked clarifying questions about total cost, current funds available, and how the Town would be protected, if providing any funding, from cost overruns.
- The Chair requested written answers to the questions previously submitted by the committee.

Decision as to whether to hear fourth funding request

Mary Streeter informed the committee of a fourth funding request received in the last 48 hours for historic preservation of the Mill Street bridge next to the Puffer's Pond waterfall. Asked committee to vote on whether to hear the proposal at all, and if so whether to hear at this meeting or on September 8. Committee agrees to hear proposal. Given the time, remaining agenda items are postponed to next meeting, September 8.

Presentation of Mill Street bridge proposal:

Vince O'Connor

- Urgency because inconvenience of long term bridge closure for many who live in area and traffic safety implications of traffic redirected to North Amherst intersections and UMass
- Majority of public opinion in past meetings has supported two way traffic on the bridge

- Repair of the feet rather than replacing the abutments leads to lower cost and maintains existing character, while replacement would require 60 foot span (as compared to current 30)
- Abutments are historic features of the bridge, can maintain the character of the site while providing safe passage
- Cost savings (\$150-200K / abutment)
- Request is \$200-300K

Staff members present raised concerns about timing and process of this proposal, which hasn't been before any town committees.

Committee asked to send questions regarding proposal to Sonia Aldrich by Friday.

Chair noted that committee would like to hear from Historic Commission on 3 proposals before us, including this one.

At 9:32pm Jim Oldham made a motion to adjourn. Peter Jessop seconded. Voted.

Documents Distributed

- CPA Agenda 2015-8-25, 1 page
- Financial Status for CPAC Funds, August 24, 2015, 1 page
- Questions about proposed CPA projects August 2015, 3 pages
- CPA Draft Minutes June 30, 2015, 2 pages
- Proposals from CPAC Meeting Handouts, June 30, 2015, as needed
- North Common - CPA Response - 8-25-2015
- North Common Responses to CPAC Questions, August 25, 2015, 3 pages
- Community Forum to discuss plans for the North Common Presentation, June 23, 2015, 12 pages
- PARC Grant Proposal: Rehabilitation & Modernization of the North Common, August 2015, 19 pages (grant application budget, photos, maps)
- Crocker Farm Preschool Playground - Response to CPAC Questions - 8-25-2015, August 25, 2015, 6 pages
- Crocker Farm Preschool Playground Conceptual Master Plan, June 23, 2015, 1 page
- Little Red Schoolhouse - Brochure for Sylvester's Building Movers, 2 pages
- Little Red Schoolhouse - Wolfe House & Building Movers Estimate, July 15, 2015, 1 page
- Letter from Jonathan Zimmerman regarding Little Red School House??
- Mill Street Bridge CPA proposal, August 25, 2015, 2 pages

Respectfully submitted by Jim Oldham.

Approved November 10, 2015